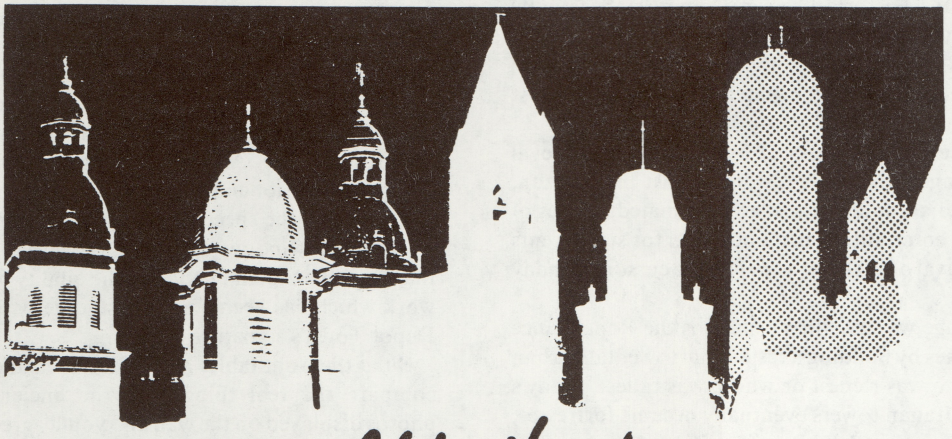
Depot Town Rag

July 1988

FREE 100% RAG CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198



10TH Annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival

AUGUST 26, 27, 28, 1988

Towers featured

"A towering attraction for tourists" is the theme of the media/press package which heralds the August 26, 27, 28 Ypsilanti Heritage Festival in its tenth year. Newspapers, radio and television stations across Michigan will pick up on the theme of Ypsilanti's unique skyline with more architectural exclamation points than your average Victorian village.

Depot Towner, Carolyn McKeever, in charge of publicity and promotion for the event, has featured Ypsilanti's majestic towers in posters, ads, mailers, post cards and fliers. Fifth Ward City Councilmember, Linda Hummel, was the photographer for the design elements.

This issue of *The Rag* takes a decidedly hometown view of those vertical architectural amenities as viewed from the Huron River Valley down by the railroad tracks.

Depot Town's towers — past and future.

Few people ever bothered to build towers at the bottom of a hill or in a valley, but the age of railroading saw towers built along the flat river plains to hold water for steam engines and to house the mechanisms for the signals necessary to operate all those fast moving trains. Still other railroad towers were simply put in place to give visual contrast to the long, horizontal depots which seemed to stretch along the east-west tracks. Detroit's Michigan Central Depot was recently abandoned by Amtrak, but several of the upper fourteen stories were never inhabited. They were only put there for the sake of the towering design.

Every so often we like to drag out those old photos of the signal towers which stood at the crossing at Cross and River streets. The most recent one was knocked down in the train wreck of 1939, but it's the earlier one that DTA sill hopes to replicate in the 1939 foundation near the corner. Those towers operated the crossing gates to prohibit pedestrian and vehicular traffic from straying onto the tracks when the train was near. Today's gates are electrically operated and often drop down and ring their alarms for hours, due to electrical failure or miscalculation. Modern inhabitants of the old apartments in the railroad district find this almost as irritating as the cable TV signal failing or the bank's computer being 'down.'

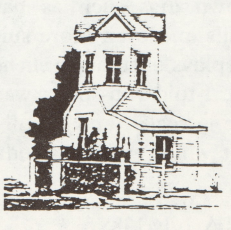
Heritage Fest booths in front of businesses?

Many neighborhood merchants remember the several Heritage Festivals when the planning committee seemed not to know anyone down here and placed crafts, food and information booths (and porta-potties!) in front of many of Depot Town's businesses. And almost every year some outside entrepreneur loped onto the block and decided to set up shop in the midst of the Festival crowd to make a fast buck pushing ice cream bars, historic plastic daisies and refrigerator magnets.

City Council passed a new ordinance last year to handle just such opportunism. The law now reads that the Festival Committee has the authority to place the booths (and collect a fee plus 10% of gross profits) in order to control the quailty and quantity of goods offered at the annual extravaganza. Food booths, of course, a subject to all the usual permissions via the Washtenaw County Health Department and Festival planners have set up sessions to help non-profit food vendors do just that.

Shop owners are still encouraged to move their regular wares to the sidewalks, however, and let the touring public know what kind of wonderful things go on here all year long --before, during and after the Heritage Festival. No permit is needed to create a sidewalk display of what goes on inside. In fact, it's encouraged.

Anyone not planning to take advantage of this excellent opportunity might want to let the Festival Committee know there is a chance for someone else to excel in that prime location next month. Call Valarie Franklin, Visitors and Convention Bureau manager at 482-4920.



Reaching new heights in historic preservation -- and appreciation of Ypsilanti's towering heritage

The Towers of Ypsilanti

"Ypsilanti has more towers than Florence, Italy!" (Popular local folklore)

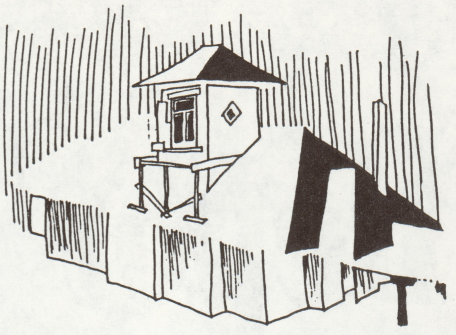
Since most of Ypsilanti's impressive towers were built along the high banks bordering the Huron River, one of the best views of our glorious collection is seen from the roof tops down in the river valley in Depot Town.

Mill owners and other wealthy citizens loved to climb into the aeries of their own homes and salute each other from the belfry, cupola, balthasar or widow's walk. Two of the most romantic examples are the residential towers of Old Town Hall and the Gilbert House. Just imagine sitting in one of them on a summer's afternoon in the mid-nineteenth century and waving to your neighbor across the Huron River.

The cupola of the Ladies library still contains the pencilled graffiti of the nineteenth century, and modern tourists will be amazed to find some of the more current additions. Would you believe that a member of Ypsilanti's Historic District Commission actually scratched his name into those pine boards in a youthful prank of vandalism? Barry LaRue has since completely reformed and now directs his attention to the exteriors of such local addresses. Besides, his was a part of a long tradition of such ego statements and seems most fitting for that special location.

Church towers signaled the faithful to service - a tradition held over from the medieval period when the cathedral was the only building in the village to reach past the horizon. Today's church towers, sometimes dwarfed by adjacent high-rises, are automated belfries of electronic gadgetry to toll special occasions and entertain the neighborhood for such events as Heritage Festival and the winter season's Festival of Lights -- as well as the cursory Sunday morning call to worship.

Certainly another part of the Victorian heritage we share in Ypsilanti is the Renaissance tradition of Italian families flaunting their fortunes by building a residential tower taller than their neighbors.' Far from being able to tell who was richest or whose was tallest, today's reflection only shows whose was built last. The Italian towers eventually became fortresses, but Ypsilanti's last war was over whether to save the historic edifices or not. The preservationist were victorious. Now, if they'll just maintain them, they'll be there for others generations to enjoy, as well.



The MCRR depot tower

This past year has seen yet another tower rise in the place of a former example. The tower protruding through the roof of the Michigan Central depot at Ypsilanti has brought new dignity and a focal point to that forlorn structure. Although the brick work and other exterior and interior rehabilitation continue, it's the spectacular tower with it's west-facing window and broad overhang that gives the best indication of the quality of work which has been going on so quietly in Depot Town's signature building.

Sit at the front tables at the Sidetrack and compare the real thing with the ancient photos displayed on the wall and you'll agree that Ypsilanti's newest tower may be short and stubby, but it's good to have it back where it belongs. While Detroit's depot is going into a period of rapid decline, Ypsilanti's is experiencing a true Renaissance.

Towering examples —

With every possible pun intended, we can truly say that Ypsilanti's towering examples of historic preservation are good for the economy — and good for the continuing quality of life in this community. They serve as exclamation points to the life of our neighborhoods.

The Depot Town open?

Spring planting is always an exciting event in Our Town, but the plotting at Apple Annie's/Jim MacDonald's Antiques goes far beyond the cursory seed catalog dreams or the check-out racks at Franks Nursery. Last year saw a bower of plastic blossoms in the planter in front of that shop, and many wondered what humorous humus would follow that initial seeding.

Summer of 1988 saw what looks like a stage set for commercials announcing the Depot Town Open: yards of Astro-turf were laid around the ample tee and golf clubs, tee and green signs and putting green appeared. Cynics scoffed and berated the gardening parody, saying that it "just wasn't the same without real growth," but grow it did!

Two pink plastic flamingoes took up residency, flipping their windmill wings in an orgiastic mating ritual. Eggs appeared and eggs were hatched. Young plastic flamingoes quickly fled their street-side nest for other Depot Town digs such as bar napkins, window sills and even more suitable commercial displays of summer cliches.

Still, the I-told-you-so-ers warn that the maple tree is *real* -- and it still needs *real* water. Not white wine and soda spritzers, either!

Red Rooster unearths still more history

Red Rooster Pizza and Dairy Bar has passed all its pre-requisites with the City and the County and is now open for business. New interior decor, new furniture, fixtures and window design grace the address which was Weber Drug for so many years. Manager, Marc Engebretzen, found some evidence of that previous tenant while working in the basement last month --

1. a matchbook advertising a primary election in 1943.
2. a tin shoe store sign for that address and
3. a roll of twenty or thirty American flags, stuffed up into the basement rafters.

They're musty and moldy, but the 48-star beauties look like they were put up there for a long-forgotten Fourth of July Parade -- and never used.

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Sidetrack

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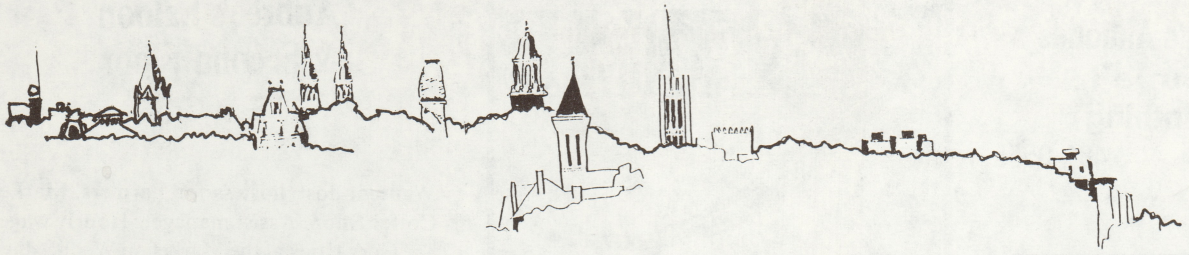

The view from here:

Seeing Ypsilanti's towers from Depot Town

Centennial Center put their office and restaurant logos on the short tower which houses the elevator machinery of the former Huron Hotel. It was Ypsilanti's first high rise and commanded an authoritarian view of a lively city.

Oscar Haab's **Italian Villa** on North Huron Street is one of the prettiest residential towers on this spectacular block of Victoriana. Isn't it nice to know that all rental apartments aren't strung out along a chemically treated pool behind fifty acres of parking shared with a shopping center?

The Ladies Library example is really only a cupola, but imagine when you could look clear up Washtenaw Avenue from this choice spot. And the view from the street was even more desireable.

The **Methodist Church** is now the loftiest ecclesiastic example in town, but St. Luke's Jasper Pennington announced to the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation last winter that the Episcopalians hope to get back into the competition some day, when their tower will return.

Old Town Hall's mansard-clad tower affords the best view down that glorious block of the mid-western architectural styles. Now look across to the east and see its partner in the **Gilbert House.** Are these the houses that caused Frank Lloyd Wright to have such fits? What was his problem, anyway?

The Presbyterian Church's three towers would pass for Catholic in any other town, but their classical stacking is welcome on any horizon.

The Water Tower at the crux of Washtenaw and Cross Streets is really the Ypsilanti Stand Pipe and enjoys its share of attention as the most debated piece of public art for more than one hundred years. Only three years ago a local committee decided to put lights on it so we could see it at night, too. How come it had to be a century old before anyone thought of that? Is there anything else we've overlooked?

Old Ypsilanti High School's clock tower is yet another replica of Philadelphia's Independence Hall. EMU's Roosevelt Hall boasts one, too. Remember the Mr. Novak TV series of the 1960's? A high school wasn't really serious unless it had one.

The Old Fire Hall enjoys yet another Italian example. The campanille design flares out just enough to shelter the pigeons of St. Mark 's piazza or to afford elbow room for firefighters hanging hoses up to dry after a fire.

Pierce Hall's modern pinnacle now houses the signal tower of our favorite radio station, WEMU.

The Farm Bureau elevators are just about the only other example down in the river valley. They were built to connect the neighboring farm lands to the country's railroad system, of course.

Trees need more water than ever

Depot Town drought report

Depot Town's pathetic maples -- which were stuck into those concrete bunker-like planters nine years ago -- will carry skinny rings in their trunks to mark the summer of 1988 only if they live long enough to ever be cut for lumber. And it's doubtful.

Since they get so little water even in a traditionally wet Michigan summer, they usually loose their leaves by the end of August. Such horrific living conditions are evident in their contorted, dried and twisted configurations. A quick inspection will show which ones get water carried to them and which don't. Why, if they lived long enough, they would be great candidates for the cover of a Gothic novel.

This year, with so little rain, they will probably be more stunted than ever.

Thoughtful neighbors will note that there is absolutely no water run-off to these sad creatures and the only moisture they receive comes in through the top of the planter. Not much has come in to them this season, of course. Some hoped the planters would be long-gone by now, due to careless parkers' collisions, but the concrete remains. The trees, however, will survive only with a few pails of water each day. If you can't carry a pail now and then, at least toss your ice cubes in their direction for the next month or so.

Look at Jack Miller's trees which were planted at the same time, but at ground level. They also get watered regularly. Now *that's* what these trees are *supposed* to look like!

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Ypsilanti Farmers Market
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459-1995

City Radiator
110 North River 483-2248

Old Town Restaurant
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
38 East Cross

Window painting proposal

Victorian window borders are still possible before Heritage Festival if Merchants and managers make their deals with window painter, Edwin Simpson when he visits each shop. As per Bill French and Marc Engebretzen's proposal at the June DTA meeting, Edwin will introduce himself and his designs to individual businesses this month and offer his artistic services. At approximately $60 per store front, Edwin has authentic Victorian window painting designs which could decorate the block in a delightful theme in watercolor or latex paints.

Another theme may be proposed to accompany the November/December/January Victorian Holiday theme which will accompany the third Festival of Lights.

37 E. CROSS
483-4555

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City Body, Inc.
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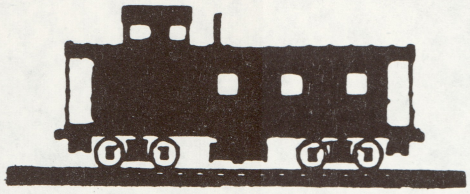
Special - **$24.95**



DTA 16 June 1988 Standing Committees

Many communications from other groups in town. DTA sponsored CBCs newsletter this month.

Membership/Volunteerism - Due to liability and workers' compensation insurance requirements, the DTA will not be able to make use of the Washtenaw County Sheriff's work program to clean up after the Frog Island Concert. Bonni Rosen is now looking for work crews to help clean up after Frog Island. Contact Bonni @ 482-FINE.

Caboose - The place to rent for your event. Only $25 with a $10 key deposit. Contact Gary McKeever @ 483-4256.

NIFTY (New Initiative For Tourism in Ypsilanti) - no report.

Budget/Events - Frog Island organization is in place and ready for the big day.

- A motion was made and passed for Jim Dulzo (Jazz Competition Co-ordinator) to address profit-sharing alternatives with the Heritage Festival Committee.

2nd Vice Presidents:

Foundation - no report

Merchants - Bill French (Aubree's Saloon) proposed that the most efficient way of addressing neighborhood window painting will be through individual action by both merchants and artist Edwin Simpson.

- Paul Fetters (River Art Works) is continuing to move forward with a comprehensive lighting plan for Depot Town with a presentation of a model and photographs to the Historical District Commission on June 21.

Artists & Artisans - helped to jury the Heritage Arts & Crafts Show. Their new gallery show opens this week in Ann Arbor.

Antique Dealers - no report.

Engineering Society - Anyone with jobs for the Engineers, make contact through the Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

Other Business -

- A 90-day hold has been put on the City DPW's plans to screen three sides of the dumpsters for the north side of Cross Street. We're looking for more innovative and pleasant looking alternatives to the unsightly and crowded accumulations.

Best Yet & Golden Goose Awards deferred until the July Meeting.

July
for the good of the block

Artists & Artisans
7:30 p.m. Monday 7/4
Caboose

Merchants' Committee
Tuesday and Thursday breakfasts
8 a.m. - Old Town Restaurant

Foundation
8 p.m. Thursday 7/7
Caboose

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday 7/21
Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:30 p.m. Thursday 7/28
Freight House Coffee Shop

Boomer Days
forget it!

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG:

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc., a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

The Depot Town Association, Inc.,
Tom Dodd, President
The Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Next month: The Sesquicentennial of the arrival of the railroad at Ypsilanti. Anyone with old photos of the depot or railyards is invited to send them to *The Rag*, via The Old Caboose. We'll return them.

Our Little Secret
Resale Clothing & Other Niceties
23 East Cross

Standard Printing Company
35 E. Cross Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
483-0339

Teachers Shop and Learning Center, Ltd. moves to Depot Town

Tuesday, July 18, the **Teachers Shop and Learning Center** is moving to a new, larger, barrier-free location. Our new address is 15 E. Cross Street. (6 blocks east of our previous location.) Our telephone number remains the same - 482-6373. Our new building is located on the east bank of the Huron River.

We will now be in Historic Depot Town with its ambience, fine food, shops and the famous Farmers' Market. you will find an abundance of free parking at our new locations. We are confident that our new building and location will be convenient, comfortable and safe for you our customers.

The Teachers Shop and Learning Center, Ltd. has been serving teachers, parents and all those other special friends of children since 1984 when Margaret Harner, a former teacher, purchased the business. Since that time we have expanded our product line significantly, as well as our services. We now stock more than 4000 different titles. Many of you have seen us at workshops or in your district on in-service days. For your convenience we provide free delivery to area schools. Special order services, resourcing consultation, and networking assistance. We also work closely with Eastern Michigan Univeristy's College of Education, providing support to their faculty and students.

We are excited about co-sponsoring a "Hands-On" Workshop in February with - **Teacher Created Materials,** Saturday, February 18, 1989, Webers Inn, Ann Arbor, Cost $45.00

Aubree's nightcrawler

Aubree's Bill French has sent his mini-school bus off to the paint shop for a fresh coat of bright red paint and Depot Town sign painters will soon be decorating the vehicle to resemble a giant worm. "The Nightcrawler" will then be available for Depot Town shenanigans, tours, and rides around the district. Watch for this tasteful alternative to trolley cars. It's the best we could do without making a deal to use the Amtrak/Conrail lines.

Patronize The Merchants That Bring You The

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Depot Town Rag

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The venerable Box Elder in the center of the Market Plaza was cut down by the City's Department of Public Works this month. Carolyn McKeever captured this impression of that sadly deseased old neighbor on June 17, 1988. Other neighbor/artists have been making it the focus of their studies, as well. Watch for an Old Tree Retrospective this winter. If we can't save its life, we can at least save its image.

Boomer bust?

Whatever happened to Boomer Days? It was a delightful little neighborhood celebration of the bums, tramps and hoboes of the railroad yards of yesteryear, but the more recent yesteryears told Depot Town planners to put their energies into the August Heritage Festival and jazz promotions, instead.

After seven or eight years of bumming around, if you can't think of anything to do with that costume you made last winter, wear it down here anyway, and all those folks on the sidewalks will know that traditions die hard in Depot Town.

It was good while it lasted and the local dailies always did a great job of covering the colorful events. But that's it. No Boomer Days this year.

Lighting up Depot Town

With summer heat and the dog days before Heritage Festival, it's hard to imagine winter drives through Riverside Park's Festival of Lights, but Depot Town Merchants' chair, Paul Fetters of River Arts Works, will present the master plan for architectural, holiday, and walkway lighting to the Historic District Commission this month.

A scale model and a promised grant from the State of Michigan will handily augment the local creativity and several thousand dollars still left in that DTA account. Watch the breakfast meetings of the Merchants' Committee for progress on this exciting project.

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Apple Annie's
Vintage Clothing
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RIVER ARTWORKS
CUSTOM FRAMING
DESIGNER MATS
48 E. CROSS
DEPOT TOWN
482-8785

Ike's Depot Town Barbershop
40 East Cross • 483-6300

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651 Rice Street
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Hon's
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46 East Cross 482-2124

Aubree's Saloon & Second Floor
39 East Cross

Wanted: host/hostess for Farmers' Market Coffee Shop. Assist manager. Hourly wage. See Gary Urick at the Market on Wednesdays or Saturdays.

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